



## Public Health Administration

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Health Officer

**Date:** February 20, 2020  
**To:** San Bernardino County First Responders  
**From:** Erin Gustafson, MD  
Acting Health Officer  
**Subject:** Vaccination Recommendations for San Bernardino County First Responders

The San Bernardino County Department of Public Health, Communicable Disease Section continues to investigate an outbreak of hepatitis A. This disease is a highly contagious liver infection that is spread when a person ingests food or water that has been contaminated by the feces of an infected person (i.e., touching objects or eating food that someone with hepatitis A handled). Between January 1, 2019 and February 14, 2020, there have been 44 cases of hepatitis A. This is significantly higher than the expected number of cases; for example, there were 3 cases of hepatitis A reported in all of 2018.

The majority of persons impacted in this outbreak have been homeless and/or persons using illicit drugs. Hepatitis A vaccination is the best way to prevent the disease. The Department of Public Health is working to increase access to the vaccine for homeless persons and illicit drug users through large vaccination clinics and outreach teams. Most employees have a low risk of contracting hepatitis A if proper hand-washing and other hygiene requirements are followed. The following categories of people are routinely recommended to get the hepatitis A vaccine by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices:

- Users of injection and non-injection illegal drugs;
- Persons experiencing homelessness and unstably housed individuals;
- People with chronic liver conditions, such as cirrhosis, Hepatitis C, & Hepatitis B;
- Men who have sex with men;
- Travelers to countries with high or medium rates of HAV;
- Persons with clotting factor disorders; and
- Persons who have occupational risk for infection
- Persons who anticipate close contact with an international adoptee
- People living with HIV; and
- Any person who wishes to be immune to Hepatitis A.

As Acting Health Officer, I am recommending that the following categories of people in San Bernardino County get the vaccine because of this outbreak:

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- Individuals with ongoing, close contact with homeless and illicit drug using individuals, including health care, public safety and sanitation workers, and those who work in homeless shelters and service agencies;

First responders can do a lot to prevent the spread of hepatitis A. Such strategies include the following:

- Remember the importance of hand-washing with soap and warm water after using the bathroom, and before preparing, serving, or eating food.
- For employees in physical contact with others, especially those at risk for hepatitis A, wear disposable gloves and wash hands after each encounter.
- **Coordinate with your occupational health provider to receive the hepatitis A vaccine.**
- **Hepatitis A vaccination will be offered at a one- time Public Health first responder vaccination event at 172 West Third St., San Bernardino, CA, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor on Feb 20<sup>th</sup> from 1:00pm – 3:00pm.**

Everyone can play a role in addressing this significant public health threat. Thank you for your help to contain the spread of this Hepatitis A outbreak.

For additional information, please go to the San Bernardino County Public Health Hepatitis A webpage at <http://wp.sbcounty.gov/dph/programs/cds/emerging-diseases/#hepatitis>. If you are interested in having someone from the county give an educational presentation on Hepatitis A to your staff and/or other organizations or ordering Hepatitis A "Hygiene Kits," please let us know. If you have any questions, please contact the Communicable Disease Section at 1-800-722-4794.

Sincerely,



Erin Gustafson, MD, MPH  
Acting Health Officer  
San Bernardino County Department of Public Health